

Boston Public Health Commission

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor

Shelter In Place

What does “shelter in place” mean?

To shelter in place means staying inside your home, possibly in a room with no or few windows, and taking refuge there. Emergency officials may ask you to shelter in place during an emergency where hazardous materials have been released into the air and it is safer to stay inside than to leave the contaminated area.

Why would I be told to shelter in place?

Chemical, biologic and radioactive materials can spread through an area rapidly once they are released into the air. They can also pass out of an area quickly. Because of this, staying inside the thick walls of your home may protect you from exposure to them.

How will I know if I should shelter in place?

If an attack occurs, emergency officials will alert the public by television and radio. You should remain in your shelter until you are told it is safe to leave.

What should I do if I’m told to shelter in place?

The following is a partial list of actions to take when instructed to shelter in place while at home. For a detailed list, including sheltering in place at work, at school or in your vehicle, visit the [American Red Cross](#) website.

- Try to remain calm.
- Do not call 911 unless you have a life-threatening emergency.
- If you are outside when the shelter in place warning is issued, go inside and take all family members, pets, and visitors with you. Leave clothes and shoes outside (or just the outer layers of clothes in cold weather), or place them in a plastic bag before bringing inside. Take a shower and wash your hair.
- Close all windows and doors. Close window blinds, shades and curtains.
- Shut off fans, heating and ventilation systems.
- Put out fires and close fireplace dampers.
- If possible, pick an inside room with few windows to shelter in. Do not choose the basement. In a release of certain kinds of chemicals, people may be advised to shelter on an upper floor.
- Use duct tape and plastic sheeting to cover windows. Air vents, exhaust fans, electrical outlets and areas around pipes may be taped. Covering your nose and mouth with a wet cloth while you prepare the area will help.
- Stay away from windows.
- Make sure you have your disaster supply kit in the room you are sheltering in.